

ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: P - Mr. Habib

FROM: ARA - Terence A. Todman

SUBJECT: The President's Interest in Argentine Human Rights Improvements

ISSUE FOR DECISION

Whether to sign the attached memorandum to Dr. Brzezinski commenting upon the human rights situation in Argentina.

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

The President is interested in recent signs of human rights improvement in Argentina.

-- If these improvements were real rather than cosmetic, our Embassy in Buenos Aires was instructed to mention the President's interest to the Argentine government.

-- At Yazoo City on July 21 the President said, "We have seen recently in Argentina 342 political prisoners, who had been there for a long time, released."

-- Jody Powell was quoted in the New Yorker on July 18, as saying, "In January, Argentina began publishing a list of those persons arrested or detained under state of siege powers, and in April it released former Senator Hipolito Solari Irigoyen, who had been

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Department of State, Argentina

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Date 10-24-66

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held without trial for eight months; it also has granted the International Committee of the Red Cross permission to visit its prisons."

The attached memorandum reports on recent human rights developments in Argentina and on how our Embassy handled its instructions.

Recommendation:

That you initial the attachment memorandum to Dr. Brzezinski.

Attachment:

Memorandum to Dr. Brzezinski.

Drafted: ARA/ECA:FERondon:jc
7/28/77:x29166

Concurrence: D/HA:

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BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

Department of State
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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI
FROM: Cyrus Vance
SUBJECT: The President's Interest in Argentine
Human Rights Improvements

Our Embassy in Buenos Aires has now responded to the instructions sent to it concerning the President's interest in human rights improvements in Argentina. The exchange of messages on this subject is attached. The Embassy concludes that recent steps have some substance, but recommends caution with respect to associating the President with any specific favorable developments. Nevertheless, our Charge in Buenos Aires did call the attention of the Minister of Economy, the key civilian in the Argentine government, to the President's statement at Yazoo City. According to the White House transcript of July 21, the President said, "We have seen recently in Argentina 342 political prisoners, who had been there for a long time, released."

We can point to the following hopeful human rights developments:

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many -- Prisoner releases. The Embassy believes that *most* of the 342 prisoners whose release was reported *little* on June 15 were, in fact, freed. *release formally* In the six weeks *formally* since, the Argentine government has reported 199 detentions and 77 releases *from effective custody*. *Some of the 77 have been released. Some have been charged* Right of option. It seems likely that the Argentine government will restore a limited form of the "right of option," whereby state of siege prisoners may seek voluntary exile. *will be a significant* This *could* lead *to many* to ~~many~~ prisoner releases. *dictated*

-- Political tolerance and the courts. There are signs that Argentine President Videla may be gaining support from other generals for a greater ventilation of political ideas with civilian leaders. This prompted Argentina's oldest party, the Radicals, to criticize the government's human rights record. The Radicals were accused of engaging in politics by the government, but rather than punish the politicians, the government took the case to the courts. The lower courts ruled against the government, and the matter is under appeal. An Argentine government ban against the Jehovah's Witnesses is now in the Supreme Court, and there is hope that the court will declare the ban unconstitutional.

On the other hand, the political situation remains very tense in Argentina, particularly in the Buenos Aires region.

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-- Eight lawyers or their wives were kidnapped at a sea resort near Buenos Aires in mid-July; one subsequently was found murdered brutally. It appears the others were released finally. It seems likely that the security forces were responsible.

-- In mid-July, Argentina's Ambassador to Venezuela was kidnapped in Buenos Aires. He has not been found yet. It appears that the kidnapping reflected hard-line military resentment against President Videla, who made a very successful state visit to Venezuela in May.

-- The publisher of the only major Argentine newspaper, which has demonstrated consistent courage on behalf of human rights, is being held by the government at a secret place of detention *(after being tortured)*.

-- At least five labor leaders have been warned recently to leave Argentina. Earlier this month a prominent Jewish leader fled to the United States after being threatened.

Nearly all serious violations of human rights in Argentina are now ^{occurring} taking in the Buenos Aires military region. The commander of the region, General Suarez Mason, is a notorious hard-line general, and viewed as one of Argentine President Videla's principal rivals for power; Suarez is seconded by a retired general who acts as governor. These men are being

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held responsible by many for the latest round of violence. In fact, Argentina's most important newspaper, La Nacion, which has not distinguished itself on behalf of human rights, called unequivocally on July 18 for the Argentine government to protect lawyers from barbarism.

Given the delicate political situation in Argentina, as well as the possibly hopeful but very uncertain human rights situation, I believe that we should await developments before further public commentary. We will remain alert for favorable developments, as the President has directed, and for appropriate opportunities to express his gratification.

Attachments:

1. State 162292, dated July 12, 1977.
2. Buenos Aires 5305, dated July 18, 1977.
3. Buenos Aires 5522, dated July 27, 1977.

Drafted: ARA/ECA: FERondon:jc
7/28/77:x29166

Concurrence: ARA/ECA - Mr. Zimmermann [copy only]

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DATE 1977 - June & July - ^{HR} Argentina
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